

GAYLAXY

Empowering eXpressions



GAY RIGHTS



A POLITICAL TURN

A photograph of two shirtless men with dark hair and beards. They are wearing white briefs and are embracing each other from behind, with their heads close together. The man on the left has his right arm around the other's shoulder. The man on the right is smiling slightly.

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Editor's Note

The festive season has begun, and I hope you all had a very prosperous Dussehra. May the blessings of Goddess Durga be upon all of you. The country has not only entered into a festive mood, but a political mood as well with elections for various states to be held in December, followed by the general elections in 2014. The anti-corruption movement, after more than a year, has decided to go political too. This raises the question whether the gay rights movement should also take a political turn to push for its demands? We talk to some prominent activists and get their views about it. In another development, two transgender activists Akkai and Kalki Subramanium were invited to the Rashtrapati Bhavan for the swearing in ceremony of the Chief Justice of India. So probably, the day isn't far when members of the LGBT community would be seen in the power corridors of India too.

A popular gay blog CSB celebrated its 5th anniversary by coming out with an e-zine. We talk to Sam (or Crazy Sam) and find out more about the blog and e-zine. If you are gay or lesbian, searching for accommodation can be an intimidating task. What if your landlord is homophobic? What if your neighbours are nosy about your activities? What if your room mates are homophobic? Will you have to be closeted and scared in your own house? Faced with such a situation himself, Sachin Jain started GHAR, an initiative that puts LGBTs and LGBT-friendly landlords, renters, roommates and flatmates in touch with each other. Inside this issue you get to know more about the initiative and how you too can benefit from it. Malaysia recently came out with guidelines to identify gay and lesbian children in schools. Srikanth Ramakrishnan writes about how ridiculous and dangerous such things could be for kids who might or might not be gay.

Pride preparations for Bangalore and Delhi pride have begun. While Bangalore will be holding the march on 2nd Dec, Delhi will be walking on 25th November. The march would be preceded by a weeklong celebration. So block your dates from now.

That's all from my side. Have a happy Diwali and do write in to us about your experience at pride.

Love,
Sukhi



Sukhiman

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A POLITICAL TURN

Gay rights activists agree that the time has come for the LGBT movement to start asserting itself politically, writes **Sukhdeep Singh**

The political scene in India is heating up day-by-day. Not only are the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 nearing up, but the elections of various states are also scheduled for December. Political parties are trying to gain new allies, forge new alliances and woo as many voters as they can. Not just the existing political parties, but people with political aspirations have also jumped in. Movements that were

strictly non-political and viewed the political class as "untouchables" have also turned political. With the atmosphere being ripe for making political inroads, isn't it time for the decade old gay rights movement in India to ask itself the question, "Is it time for the movement to turn political?"

Activists Speak

Many of the leading gay rights

activists of India agree that the time has come for the LGBT movement to start asserting itself politically. Pawan Dhall, gay rights activist from Kolkata and a pioneer of the first gay pride parade of India, feels the gay rights movement has already turned political in a way. "The moment you actually start looking at something from a rights angle and talk about it as a human rights issue, you are politicizing the issue," he says.

Manohar Elavarthi, founder of Sangma- a human rights organization working with sexual minorities, sex workers and people living with HIV in India, goes a step further and says that in a democracy, every movement must turn political if it aspires to bring some real change. "When you are talking about democracy, the power is in the hands of the parliament/assembly, and there is no question of staying out. Staying out basically means you will have no space in decision making," he points out.

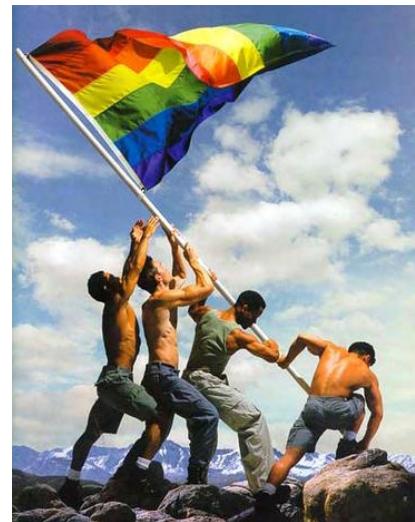
I don't think putting a gay candidate is the issue. The issue is having candidates who are committed to LGBTI rights

But in a country like India, where sex is still discussed in hushed tones and sex-education is shelved under the carpet, would political parties be willing to even listen to issues related to sexual orientation and gay rights? Or should members of the community form their own political party to raise their demands, and will such a party be able to make any difference? Rose Venkatesan, the famous transgender TV host from Chennai, feels that a separate political party for LGBTs is the answer and has

already floated her own party named Sexual liberation Party that will be working towards sexual freedom and the rights of women and LGBT people. However, others have a different opinion on how best can political support be won for gay rights.

Gay Political Agenda

According to Mr. Dhall, the next step for the movement is to have the gay rights issue figure in the political agenda of the parties. "May be what we can do is advocate with them on the larger issues of gender and sexuality and within that talk about LGBT rights," he opines. Manohar Elavarthi, on the other hand, advocates direct involvement with mainstream political parties and sounds a note of caution against forming a LGBTI party. "You can't have a gay political party to win seats. Even in countries where you have proportional representation, we don't see gay parties. Take South Africa for example; gay people operate dominantly as part of African National Congress. There are many countries with proportional representation parties. Even there, by and large, progressive LGBTI are entering mainstream political parties and that is the way to go," he says. "The LGBTI people should push for political space which means join political parties, put your agenda on the political parties," he adds. Ashok Row



Kavi, one of India's leading gay rights activists, also shares views similar to Manohar in terms of participating as openly gay men/women in political activities, "We can be the catalysts by participating openly as gay men in political parties. The LGBT community need not wave banners. We can be gay and part of a party by merely saying so. That kind of transparency will help 'normalise' our presence."

But will a political party be willing enough to field an openly gay candidate? Manohar believes that what is important is not for a gay candidate to get elected, but a candidate who understands and supports LGBTI rights should get elected. "You don't have to be a woman to represent women issues. I don't think putting a gay candidate is the issue. The issue is having candidates who are committed to LGBTI rights," he says.

Advocacy Attempts

Underway

Attempts have been made in the past to connect with the political parties. The erstwhile group LGBT India had approached some of the major political parties in the year 1999 with their demands. "Though none of the parties refused to meet, their response was mostly non-committal," recalls Pawan, "but that was the year 1999. The scene has changed very much since then because Sec 377 has been talked about at the highest level- at the Planning Commission level. So there is a good chance that the response will be good." Even now, constant efforts are being made to talk about and sensitise government bodies about gay issues. "There have been continuing efforts to network with all parties. Efforts are on by the Integrated Network for Sexual Minorities (INFOSEM) to meet municipal counselors, MLAs, MPs and even other gate-keepers like Election Commission, Planning Commission," tells Ashok. "Gay and lesbians along with transgendered people have met the people in the Planning Commission and the National Commission for Human Rights to talk about our issues. Some of us have networked with members of the activist group "Vada Na Todo" (Don't Break the Promise) to talk about our issues along with the promises made to other civil society groups," he informs. With the

2014 general elections approaching, Pawan feels it is a good time for LGBT groups across India to engage with the political parties and is hopeful that parties will at least agree with the Delhi High Court judgement of decriminalization of homosexuality, though getting support for other issues pertaining to equality may remain elusive. "I think that almost all of them (political parties) will say to the extent of that they are in favour of decriminalizing. Probably they won't go against that because that is a safe benchmark at the moment. But the moment we talk about equality in terms of other issues like inheritance and adoption and marriage and all, that is when one needs a long term advocacy."

Reality of Vote Bank Politics

But will advocacy and sensitization of officials be sufficient to push forward the demands of the community and bring about legal reforms that may be required, which can only be done by the parliament, which has so far

The moment we talk about equality in terms of other issues like inheritance and adoption and marriage and all, that is when one needs a long term advocacy

even shied from discussing the issue of decriminalization of homosexuality? Then again, in the vote bank politics of India, politicians take note of a community's demands only if they see a substantial vote base. Can the LGBTI community then be a vote bank for the Indian politicians, given that the community belongs to all religions, regions? Manohar believes that once the issue is politicized well and parties can see a vote base, they will be more forthcoming in their support, "You need to have a base to push for LGBTI rights. Once you have X number of voters who will vote based on the LGBTI issues, then parties will take note." Categorization as LGBTI vote bank is the one reality that, according to Pawan, will happen sooner or later and has already begun in some parts of the country. "There are already overlaps between the leadership of CBOs and the connection between these leaderships and political parties. One group in West Bengal has even gone on record saying that in the next elections, all their members will vote for a particular party. I don't think that LGBT groups should approach with vote bank politics in mind, because at the end that is going to happen," he says.

Could the pride marches then not be used as a political platform to project the gay vote bank, given that many cities across India now are

holding such marches successfully with a large participation of members of the community? And not only pride marches, other events like film festivals could also provide a good platform for such a purpose. Pawan Dhall cautions that if political leaders were to be invited for such events, one must be careful not to leave out any party lest it sends out a wrong message. "Who ultimately turns up is a very crucial issue itself. What if that person has a criminal record? I think it is better in that sense not to invite political leaders, but rather to invite Govt. officials." Ashok Row Kavi advices networking with other marginalized groups and finding new allies and friends. "Try and find friends everywhere and anywhere," he says. "It's also time to network with every citizen who is kept out of the productive and societal visible space, say the Dalits, and ally with them. Oppression of any innocent person -- common citizen or otherwise -- is also our problem. But do that as an open homosexual without fear and without shame."

Mr. Row Kavi though remains skeptical about depending on political leaders, "I think it's dangerous to depend too much on political activists of any dogmatic ideological group because they are already compromised. We need an open channel policy where equity and justice are offered to all citizens as an

The real way forward is to be more open in social and political spaces as gay men and lesbian women. Being openly gay or lesbian is a political statement

entitlement without any quid bono quo. When someone is wrong then get up and say so. Don't demonise but educate." Being open about your sexuality remains the best political statement, he says. "The real way forward is to be more open in social and political spaces as gay men and lesbian women. For that we need more people to be open about their sexuality. Don't be a member of a gay or sexual minority CBO today and then resign and go become a 'political activist' tomorrow. That is hypocrisy. Being openly gay or lesbian is a political statement. If that's not understood, nothing really is worth it!"

Sensitised Leaders – The

Way Forward

Across the globe, in many Western countries, gay rights have become a political issue and form a determining factor for garnering votes in some countries. In India, Tamil Nadu could surely teach a lesson or two to the rest of the country. Transgender rights have been taken up by the two main parties of the state and the state has already formed a welfare board to advance the rights of transgenders. For the first time ever, two transgenders Akkai and Kalki Subramaniam were invited to Rashtrapati Bhavan for the swearing in ceremony of the Chief Justice of India. But will India have its Harvey Milk or Sunil Babu Pant moment anytime soon? That is probably not a question that matters as of now. As Mr. Dhall puts it, "In a Parliament of 540+ leaders, even if 40 leaders can be sensitized through their parties, it is better than having one MP and never being heard."



No Pride for Russia



The court at St. Petersburg upheld a ban on gay pride events. Are rights in Russia deteriorating? **Tanika Godbole** gives an account of the recent crackdown on LGBT supporters in Russia

"Hell's teeth, something must be done to stop these fantastical monsters. Will talking about Tchaikovsky be banned?"

-Stephen Fry, British actor and comedian on Russia's ban on homosexual propaganda in March 2012.

Seven years ago, when two men in Russia got married at a church, the priest got defrocked and the marriage annulled. Gay marriage remains illegal in Russia to this day. However, on the 17th of August 2012, a city court in Russia upheld a ban on gay pride event for the next 100 years, infuriating LGBT activists and supporters in Russia and throughout the world. Nikolay Alexeyev, one of Russia's best known gay rights activist took this ban to court, hoping to achieve the freedom to organize and participate in gay pride events. (He then took the case to the European Court in Strasbourg which charged the Russian Court for discriminating against Alexeyev on the basis of sexual orientation.) For a country that decriminalized homosexual relationships in 1993, this is a move in the wrong direction. Although homosexuality and homosexual relationships are by themselves legal,

47% of Russians believe that homosexuality is a behaviour acquired under the influence of media

being publicly open about it is not. President Putin's main botheration with gay rights seems to be that it goes against traditional family values. That Putin does not like change is obvious from his clutch on the regime; and change from the traditional form of relationships is something he doesn't seem to fathom. Reportedly, he believes that it is against nature since same-sex couples cannot produce children. This is apparently an ultimate reality and he is "ready to

be patient."

Putin's Russia is moving backwards

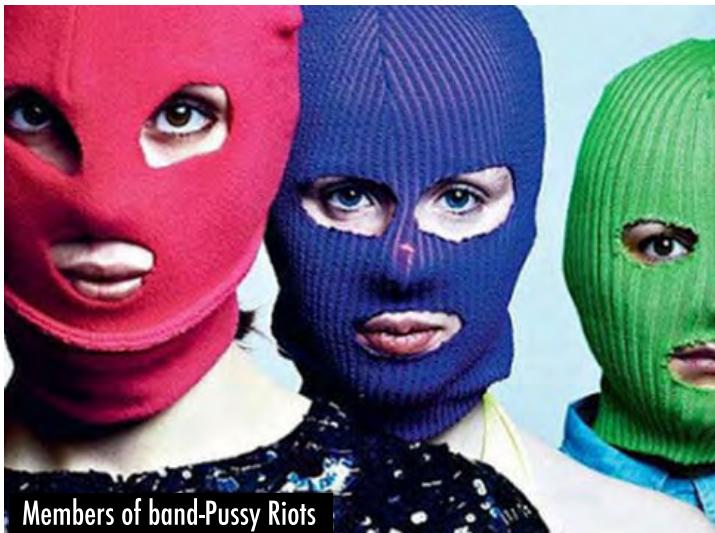
In March 2012, the city of St Petersburg passed a law banning "public actions aimed at propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality, [and] transgenderism amongst minors". According to Russian regional media; talks of a similar ban have been in process at Moscow. Russia has much bigger problems to face; yet she has taken the time out to oppose and ban homosexuality and LGBT "propaganda". This law has been criticized internationally as well as in Russia. Apart from the acknowledgement of individual freedom, what the law lacks is clarity. The human rights ombudsman of Russia, Vladimir Lukin, himself called the law 'strange'. However, the human rights ombudsman has taken no action since he believes that publicity of sexual preference is not socially acceptable. This law took its first victims when the police at St. Petersburg arrested two activists on the 5th of April, who were holding placards saying 'It's normal to be gay'. The spread of this law would inevitably result in people believing that homosexuality is something unnatural. The law seems to make the assumption that homosexuality is learned behaviour and there is no proof for it being a natural sexual orientation (apart from thousands of personal testimonials).



Ninety-six percent of the Russian populace believe that they have never been subject to gay propaganda of any sort except by the media, according to VTsIOM, a state-run pollster. Surprisingly enough, eighty-six percent of the participants of this poll felt the ban on homosexual propaganda was welcome. Russia's two dominant religions – orthodox Christianity and Islam both frown upon homosexual relations. Over 80% of the population belong to either of these groups. Forty-seven percent of Russians believe that homosexuality is a behaviour acquired under the influence of media. That homosexuality is an evil outcome of the influence of the west is not exactly an uncommon belief. Yet several media channels of Russia have been accused of acting as a voice against homosexuality. Putin may have had his bit of denunciation on the international scene for several issues, but his stance on homosexual relations has caused great outrage in the international human rights community. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have both severely condemned this action.

The dangers of a badly composed anti-gay law are much worse. No clear definition of the word 'propaganda' gives the authorities the right to potentially interpret any action as propaganda and arrest anyone who violates the law. Apart from international criticism; Putin's agenda faces some pretty tough competition from Pussy Riot, the female punk band. Pussy Riot stormed into the scene in November 2011 with their guerrilla performances, including the ones at the Red Square and Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral, has made them a menace for the Kremlin. A

strong voice against gender and supporter of LGBT rights, members of Pussy Riot were arrested in February this year. LGBT rights protests in Russia added another demand: the release of Pussy Riot. Amidst protests and demonstrations, they were released, only to be arrested again and sentenced for two years on charges of hooliganism on 17th August, 2012. While many protested against their arrest, Putin and the Orthodox Church took a patronizing stance, urging the judiciary to not be "too harsh" on the girls. The spunky girl band's bold performances have made them a voice for LGBT and women's rights and the freedom of expression. They have inspired several Russian as well as international supporters. Pussy Riot's star studded fan list includes names like Björk, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Green Day and Madonna.



Members of band-Pussy Riot

"Tonight, and every night, I like to live dangerously." This is what Madonna said as she showed her support for LGBT rights and Russian female punk band Pussy Riot at her performance this August at St. Petersburg. And dangerously she lives. Madonna is now being

sued by a Russian anti-gay rights organisation for \$10 million, who claim that she insulted their feelings by speaking up against gay rights at her concert. The vice-president of Russia, Dmitry Rogozin condemned her moral lecturing on twitter, asking her to "Either take off your cross, or put on your knickers." Ironically, some gay rights organisations have also criticized Madonna's actions, saying that she should have abandoned the tour rather than come and speak against it.

An end to the struggle is nowhere in sight for Russia's LGBT community. Revolutionaries like the Pussy Riot will keep coming along, as long as rulers who refuse to accept reality inhabit the Kremlin.



INDIA

★ For the first time, two transgenders, Kalki Subramaniam and Akkai were invited by the Rashtrapati Bhavan to participate in the swearing in ceremony of Chief Justice of India Honourable Altamas Kabir.

★ A bench comprising Justices K S Radhakrishnan and Dipak Misra has termed the deprivation of transgenders as a serious matter and issued notices to the governments, asking what could be done to give them their rights.

★ Madurai Lady Doak College for Women offered free seats for transgender people(both transmen & transwomen). They announced this during the Turing Rainbow Festival held in Madurai. The college will be providing free accommodation, food, hostel & education to them.

★ Hyderabad hosted an art exhibition on pluralities of gender and sexuality from Oct 5th-



Akkai (left) and Kalki (right) in front of the Rashtrapati Bhavan

11th Festival in the month of June.

★ Transgender voters registering for the first time can have their voter registration form signed by a guru (teacher), according to a recent order by Election Commission of India. Till now, only parents of transgenders could sign the form, and man refused to do so after their wards declared themselves transgenders.

★ Bangalore will hold pride march on Dec 2nd this year, while Delhi will have it on Nov 25th.





G-NEWS: World



★ A British gay couple have won the right to father twin boys after a surrogate Indian woman disappeared without giving her formal consent. The couple had arranged to pay a Hyderabad clinic £17,000 (\$21,200 €27,400) to become the children's parents under a commercial surrogacy agreement in 2010 which covered treatment and costs. But after the babies were born in India in 2011, the surrogate mother disappeared without giving consent for them to be treated as the British couple's children.



- ★ Gay parents in Australia will be eligible for paid parental leave from January 2013.
- ★ France is set to ban the words 'mother' and 'father' from all official documents under its controversial plans to legalise gay marriage. The draft law states that "marriage is a union of two people, of different or the same gender and also gives equal adoption rights to homosexual and heterosexual couples."
- ★ China's Fujian province saw its first ever public gay wedding between two young men, who had already made history by getting engaged in nearby Guangdong province.
- ★ Two women became the first couple to have a Buddhist same-sex wedding in Taiwan. Fish Huang and You Ya-ting , who have been together for seven years, exchanged vows and prayer beads instead of rings at a monastery in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, accompanied by chants from nearly 300 Buddhists.
- ★ After a much heated debate, Australian parliament voted 98 to 42 to reject gay marriage in the country.
- ★ California has become the first state to ban reparative/conversion therapy for minors.
- ★ Hong Kong now has an openly gay lawmaker. Newly elected People Power representative Raymond Chan Chi-chuen received more than 38,042 votes to win a seat in New Territories East in Sunday's election, beating incumbent and Democratic Party (DP) vice-chairwoman Emily Lau Wai-hing by 1,000 votes.
- ★ Google has removed 'bisexual' from its list of dirty words.
- ★ Education Ministry of Malaysia recently published guidelines for parents and teacher to detect homosexuality in children. According to the guidelines, signs of homosexuality in boys may include preferences for tight, light-coloured clothes and large handbags, V-necked T-shirts. For girls, the details were less clear. Girls with lesbian tendencies have no affection for men and like to hang out and sleep in the company of women, the guidelines pointed.



THE CURIOUS CASE OF NORMAL/ABNORMAL, NATURAL/UNNATURAL

Using terms like unnatural or abnormal for alternate sexuality just shows our lack of understanding of things, writes **Sukhdeep Singh**

The debate on homosexuality has always centered around two things- unnatural and abnormal. The "unnatural" view point mostly deals with the religious views, while the "abnormality" remark hovers around medical science. When you reveal your sexuality to someone, it isn't uncommon to hear, "You should get treated, it is a mental thing" or "It is a hormonal imbalance" and that "You are going against nature... the world wouldn't exist otherwise" or "God made man and woman separate, you are going against His laws". As I sat down trying to make a colleague understand that there is nothing unnatural or abnormal about homosexuality, I realized the very understanding of the term normal and natural seem to be unclear to people. I will try to address these two issues here.

First let us try and understand what the word "normal" and "abnormal" actually means in medical terms. As freedictionary.com puts it, being normal is being *free from any infection or other form of disease or malformation, or from experimental therapy or*

manipulation; which essentially means that the person should be able to perform all basic activities freely, without any difficulties whatsoever. However, the word normal in daily English usage is often confused (and used as a replacement for) **common**, and therein lies the folly.



When talking about homosexuality, we confuse between what is common and what is normal. Probably what a person often means to say is that it isn't common, but due to his/her own ignorance, arrogance and lack of understanding of the subject, ends up using the word "normal" and makes it sound like a medical term. Without delving into the research papers and keeping things simple for a layman to

understand, let me prove my point with a few examples from our daily life and make things more clear to you. I say "daily life" because just like sexuality, these things (rather biological characteristics) have been around us, some common, some not so common, but we never seem to use the word "normal". We all know that there are 4 blood groups, A, B, AB and O, and these are further marked as Rh+ or Rh-. While the distribution of the blood group among the population varies from country to country, blood group AB- remains the rarest, with a global population of less than 0.5% having this blood group type. Still, when we meet such a person or hear his/her blood group, we don't call him/her abnormal, or call ourselves normal. At the most, we will say, he/she has a rare blood group. We do not judge him/her based on his/her blood group, we do not question his/her abilities based on it, we do not discriminate against him/her and neither do we deny him/her any other rights whatsoever. Despite having an uncommon blood group, the person is perfectly normal in all ways because it doesn't

affect his/her ability to perform and live life in any way. We don't call him/her diseased, or ask him/her to get his/her blood changed. Compare this with our attitude towards homosexuality. The percentage of any population that is homosexual lies between 5-10% (the numbers remain debatable, and optimistic estimations put it even higher), yet, we call them "abnormal", at times "diseased". Alternate sexuality also doesn't hinder any person's ability in any way, in fact, people with alternate sexuality have often been found to be extremely creative and talented as well. Yet, we are so quick at telling them that they are abnormal and should get treated. Same can be said about left-handed people. While a majority of us are right-handed, there are people who are left-handed, and they are perfectly normal as well.

Let me move a little away from such biological talk to stardom. That Hrithik Roshan has 6 fingers instead of 5 is not unknown to anyone. We also know that some people do have sex fingers in either both or any one of the hands. This again is uncommon. Yet, such people are perfectly normal, there is nothing wrong with them. Just because most of us have 5 fingers, doesn't make Hrithik Roshan (or others) abnormal in anyway. Six fingers might be rare; still, it is not an

Blood group AB-ve remains the rarest, with a global population of less than 0.5% having this blood group type. Still, when we meet such a person or hear his/her blood group, we don't call him/her abnormal

abnormality as it doesn't affect our abilities. You do not express hate against such people, neither do you advocate killing such people. Yet, homosexual people, who are more "common" than six-fingered people, get killed for being different, have all the hatred spewed against them, are denied rights, and, are called abnormal.

I will next come to the argument of natural-unnatural. Here again, let me begin with our own understanding of what natural and unnatural actually means. Anything that is found in Nature (that includes Earth, and also Universe) is natural. I included Universe in the definition because had the term been restricted to Earth, it would have rendered Sun, Moon and the planets as unnatural!! I would also like you to revisit your school days for a short time. We were taught two classifications-natural and artificial (or man-made). Anything found in Nature was natural, and anything man-made, like the

houses, cars, computers etc, artificial. Strange that nowhere the word "unnatural" was used, because even though man-made or artificial, nothing was unnatural, because it was all derived from nature. Yet strangely enough, when it comes to our own fellow human beings with alternate sexuality, we term them (or their sexuality) as unnatural. This despite the fact that homosexuality has been recorded in over 1500 species. Even if it would have existed in only one specie, the question to be asked here is, 'Should we have called it unnatural?' Clearly, something that occurs in nature cannot be unnatural. Still, not only is homosexuality found in so many species, homosexuals have been present in human race (and other species) for ages, and despite the best efforts of man in the gone by years (and in many countries) to eliminate homosexual humans, nature keeps bringing them to this world. So the question that again needs to be asked is, 'How can you call something (or someone) unnatural when it exists and has existed in Nature itself for centuries?' The one question in this natural-unnatural debate that keeps popping up is that the "natural" goal of any being in this world is to take ahead the specie/gene pool. It amazes me how narrow our own understanding of natural laws

can be. It was probably for the same reason that homosexuals form a minority and not a majority!! Strange again that we are so concerned with the fact that someone might not procreate when the world population is already burgeoning. The world reached its present numbers even when people of alternate sexuality existed between them. It certainly didn't eliminate the human race. Somehow, no such human concerned about the survival of "mankind" seems to give a thought about how the other 1500 or more species have survived and keep surviving. There have been research studies which show from an evolutionary point of view how and why homosexuality exists.

Clearly, it is our lack of understanding of (or knowledge about) the laws of nature that leads us to being so judgemental when someone is even a little different than us. To be frank,

Just because most of us have 5 fingers, doesn't make Hrithik Roshan abnormal in anyway

mankind doesn't understand all laws or forces of nature. Our understanding has only increased over the years, yet it is not complete. There are questions that we still grapple with and are yet to find answers too. And it is after this understanding that now the scientific world and medical science is unanimous in telling that homosexuality is not a disease, neither unnatural nor abnormal. Our understanding of the topic is still not complete, we still grapple with the question as to why some men/women have alternate sexuality. More and more evidence and research now points to the fact that one's sexuality is genetic and that people are born that way.

So next time you call a person of alternate sexuality as abnormal or unnatural, do keep these things in mind. If there is something that is unnatural in this world, then it is the vehicle you drive, the house you live in, the computer and mobile you can no longer live without, the dyed hair that you proudly show off. It is these things that are unnatural, not humans with alternate sexuality. Words can have powerful and deep impact on others, and you never know how your ignorance on the topic is affecting someone else. It is because of the careless, hurtful and hateful attitude and prejudices of ours that so many people in this world are living a difficult life, getting killed, committing suicide, living a life of fear and persecution. However, the fault isn't with them, the fault remains with you!!

*This post was originally written for
ISM Diaries – The Unofficial Blog
of ISM*



FEED ME!



Bengaluru *Pride*

Bengaluru Pride and Karnataka Queer Habba 2012

Call for financial support

The Bengaluru Pride march will be held on **Dec 2nd, Sunday**. The preceding nine days will be filled with Pride related events, such as a theatre festival with participants from around the country, poetry reading, photography exhibition and the Mela. This year's Pride is organised through CSMR (Campaign for Sexuality Minorities Rights), which is a collective of many LGBTQ groups, allied supporters and individuals. It is heartening and absolutely awesome to have all the various groups come together to help organise these events. However, we also need to fund the event, and we are primarily looking at individual and organisational donations. Hence this is a call for all of you, and your friends, and your groups, to generously financially support Bengaluru Pride and Karnataka Queer Habba 2012.

For information on how to make a donation, contact Sam (Shyam) at samuel.konnur@gmail.com

(Please mention "Pride" in the subject line)

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A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Tanika Godbole tracks the journey of GHAR (Gay Housing Assistance Resource)

Twelve years ago, Sachin Jain was a young gay man in Mumbai who wanted a place to live. It was his first time living away from his family. Apart from the difficulties that a paying guest faces in Mumbai, Sachin had to face an additional one of homophobia. "A snoopy neighbour aunty would actually peek into my living room through the peephole on the door, and once I peeped right back! As I talked to gay and lesbian friends who also rented, I heard stories about hostile housing societies and bigoted straight room-mates," he says.

Sachin could not feel free in his own house; he did not feel comfortable inviting his friends or partner over. He felt the need to hide his belongings or keep them locked up at all times. "The worst thing was the necessity to hide oneself in the closet, or become this sex-less, sexuality-less being languishing in the shadows of don't ask - don't tell," he recalls.

Within four months, Sachin moved out of the place. He knew then that he did not want loneliness. This is what pushed him to establish Gay Housing Assistance Resource, or GHAR in the year 2000. "I remember in the

initial years of GHAR, Sopan, a friend, gave me a ceramic house as a gift with "*Ye tera GHAR*" written on the bottom – I have kept it with me for over a decade!" he reminisces.

GHAR faced a few glitches before it could establish its own ground. Guised and direct personal advertisements for sex were one of the nuisances. Even with genuine advertisements, the group did not have enough member support to be able to help each other out.

Even in developed metropolitan cities in India, acceptance of openly homosexual people, especially in residential complexes is to be achieved. The society by and large has opened up to acknowledge LGBT rights, but is not liberal enough to accept homosexuals living within their vicinity. This is changing, slowly but surely. GHAR has been pretty much left to its own devices. More and more people coming out of the closet has surely helped, but the attitudes of the authorities have been beneficial in making the atmosphere a lot friendlier towards the LGBT and GHAR.

"Many people come up with thoughts for the road ahead, being afraid of loneliness in

old age. There is a constant refrain of the need to create a place where families of choice of LGBT persons can live peacefully and with dignity, so that they are not forced to retreat into the closet if their productive years are behind them," says Sachin Jain.

Apart from social networking and changing attitudes, Sachin's patience and perseverance has been vital in the success of GHAR. "Humour is the best way to cope with it. Share your stories, have a laugh and move on. Also, getting in touch with the queer community from the developing world - knowing that there are countries with the death penalty for being gay, where activists are holding pride parades nevertheless - is also inspiring."

GHAR now provides housing assistance to people in six Indian cities as well as USA and Canada. The facebook debut of GHAR in 2012 has skyrocketed, with 600 new members and 30 new posts. To find a place on GHAR is simple enough. After sending a request to join the Facebook group called G.H.A.R. (Gay Housing Assistance Resource), you will be added to the group by an administrative member. You can then post your advertisement for letting or renting by creating a post. The group also suggests



Sachin Jain, the man behind G.H.A.R

estate agents and LGBT-friendly property websites. Searching for LGBT housemates and emergency asylum are two outstanding features of GHAR.

Sachin feels that there was a noted difference in people's attitudes after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2009. He says, "The LGBT Facebook generation is much more assertive and confident about itself." The ability to put up pictures on this social platform has made it far easier for people to find a home that suits their needs.




Crazy Sam hails from India and he is gay. He is not a serious blogger, but occasionally he feels like writing about himself, the people he meets, the experiences he cherishes, the music and movies he loves, the cute guys that catch his eyes... add a pinch of craziness to all that and you get a bird's eye view into his life through his blog..

Crazy Sam's Bloginess

THE STRAIGHT-FRIENDLY GAY BLOG

Disclaimer : The models featured on CSB mock-up covers have no affiliation with Crazy Sam's Bloginess (CSB) in any way whatsoever.

Popular Indian gay blog CSB came out with an e-zine to celebrate its 5th anniversary. **Sukhdeep Singh** finds out more from Sam

Indian LGBT community was in for a treat in September when the popular blog CSB (Crazy Sam's Bloginess) came out with an e-zine to celebrate its 5th anniversary. The over 70 page Anniversary issue has articles covering a wide range of topics from gay life, homophobia to photography and modelling and is a collection of CSB articles over the period of 5 years. CSB is the personal blog of Sam where he vents out his thoughts and feelings which he can't express in the real world.

If there is one thing that catches your attention about CSB at the first go, then it is the tagline "Straight Friendly Gay Blog". Sam has an interesting explanation as to why he chose that tagline. "I saw there are many gay blogs who were talking about issues faced by gay community, but don't seem to consider involving straight community as a part of the solution. Just like the situation that existed a few years ago – of the limited number of gay Indian blogs - similar is the case

presently in terms of the number of gay Indian blogs that straight community can visit, to understand what actually goes through someone they know who is gay. The posts that appear on CSB try to make a connection that straight people can identify in their lives and then attempt to draw a similar analogy to help them comprehend gay thoughts and feelings. I also make sure that the pictures that get selected for CSB posts are not sexually explicit or repulsive in nature," he explains.



Though the blog started as a personal blog of Sam (or Crazy Sam, as he calls himself), it slowly transformed into a gay website portal highlighting the issues faced by gay community, offering support to lessen their dilemmas, raising a voice against homophobia and paedophilia, chronicling Sam's coming to terms with sexuality, interacting with famous

photographers and male models, and spreading cheer with aesthetic male shots. "I realized that there is a need to throw light on the many misconceptions regarding homosexuality and gay men. And I began to write articles to address these issues. At the same time, I started to get mails from other gay men seeking my view on their personal life issues. And I thought if these mails and my responses were published on CSB, there will be so many others who could benefit from them, at least in realizing that they are not alone. And that's how the 'Ask Sam' series happened. I also wanted CSB to showcase the best of male photography," tells Sam. With over 400 dedicated subscribers and 500 followers to the blog worldwide, including fashion photographers, CSB remains one of the most popular gay blogs from India.

Each year CSB would celebrate its anniversary with a mock-up cover, indicating that an e-zine was very well in the offing. "I have always wanted to try out how CSB

would look like in a magazine format. The idea had been haunting me for more than a year, but then time and circumstances didn't seem to be apt for such an exhaustive project," says Sam. "I wanted to do something big for CSB's fifth anniversary and I knew there could never be a better moment for this project than now. Plus, it is also easier to

go through articles in a magazine format where you can just flip through, rather than browsing hundreds of links," he adds.

Thus, the e-zine carries some of the best articles that have appeared on the CSB blog. The content is so designed that it appeals to the straight community as well and also

lends a supporting hand to those who are confused regarding their sexuality. There are Anniversary special articles (which haven't appeared on the blog) too. The magazine also features the fantastic works of Los Angeles & San Francisco men's fashion photographer, Ronald N Tan and interviews of Shobhna Kumar (founder of the online queer bookstore - Queer Ink) and Billy Graham (founder and CEO of the LGBT social network - Showcase Freedom).

Does that mean that India can brace up for another gay e-mag? Not so soon, he says. "The entire experience of making the current e-zine of CSB made me realize that it requires a lot of time, effort, creativity and patience. I had to design each page and article to give it the look and feel of a fashion & lifestyle magazine. Plus it is a collection of CSB articles over the period of 5 years. So in terms of a second magazine entirely written by me, it will take time." But then, he does state his intentions of coming out with a gay magazine on a quarterly frequency in the future. "I will soon start the search for writers and photographers who can contribute for the magazine edition." Till that happens, you can happily flip through this anniversary issue.



Travails of Entrapment Decoded

HHadi Hussain talks to Dr. Himadri Roy about his debut novel Travails of Entrapment

Hadi: *What was the inspiration behind writing this novel?*

Dr. Roy: To be open and closed about my world, sufferings and pains, abuses and discriminations, acceptance and denial by family and relatives, friends and foes that I personally felt in life, was the main inspiration for writing the novel. The lives of a few of my close friends were also an inspiration behind it.

Hadi: "Travails of Entrapment" has a huge palette of human emotions on display, it's more like an epic tale, how do you feel about it? Was it deliberate?

Dr. Roy: Thanks for terming it an 'epic tale', I would say that's the best compliment ever that I have received from anyone. I don't know how much emotional portrayal and justification of it I could do, but yes, it's definitely deliberate. Believe it or not, most of the gays in this country undergo severe psychological turmoil at every phase of life, still they ruthlessly survive in the heteronormative society of India, with just one thought in mind, 'One day will come when I will be liberated'. This hope leads them to struggle through all odds. Keeping that in mind, I fictionalized as much as I could. To be frank enough, most of it is the crude reality of being gay in this country.

Hadi: Rohan De was brought up



in a small city and then moved to Delhi, is it in some way autobiographical?

Dr. Roy: (Laughs) Most of you have asked me this question. I mustn't at all deny that. Yes it's partly autobiographical, I also did move from a small town to this big metropolitan. But the main reason behind it is that we gays tend to think if we live far away from our family, we can live the way we want to. This escapist mindset, is the main motive in portraying the story that way. Moreover coming back

to my family, my parents accepted me when I was a teenager. So it's not totally autobiographical you see.

Hadi: At times, writers do develop an attachment with the characters they are infusing life into. So tell us who is your favourite character and why?

Dr. Roy: That's a tough question! It would be sheer injustice if I support one and leave the others. They are all dear to my heart from Rohan to Vaibhav,

from Paras to Kunal, from Monisha to Ruchika, from Gonika to Meena, everyone is a part of the same family. But yes within the domain of the family, we all human beings tend to love one a bit more than the other, in this case, as I'm the creator of all these characters, I prefer not to choose out one. Many of my readers did like one character to the other; they find lots of similarities between their life and the character they adore. Tell me, how can I create an imbalance between them and prefer one? Won't my readers feel hurt?

Hadi: When you have been passionately writing a story for so long, it tends to become a part of yourself. How did you deal

with these feelings when you had finished Travails of Entrapment?

Dr. Roy: Yes, I do feel passionate about each character, sometimes I cry like Rohan, sometimes I feel jealous like Nikhil, sometimes I feel excited like Paras, or even sometimes I crave the pangs of separation like Meena. Being my debut novel, this book is very close to my heart. My readers sometimes call me and say, 'Please read these lines from so-so page.' I do follow like an obedient person and read those mentioned lines, and you know what? I feel exactly that emotion which is undermining in them. That's how I deal with the characters now.

Hadi: Do you think that *Travails of Entrapment* has been able to break stereotypes or is it strengthening them?

Dr. Roy: I'm not a rebel, so I'm not here to revolutionize anything. Yes, definitely I wanted to break some stereotypes, at the same time, I did create some stereotypes. For example, breaking the stereotypical thought that your parents won't

be able to accept you or deny you, if you disclose your sexual identity. I have both the characters- Paras who was accepted, while Rohan who was denied. On one hand, Nikhil changes his emotional bondage with Rohan, while on the other Vaibhav accepts him more sentimentally; now how does one compartmentalize these stereotypicality? It's all on my readers to think about, it would be very selfish if I do so, isn't it?

Hadi: What are your thoughts

"Aren't the rural or pahadi people (as in the novel) more tolerant when sexuality is considered? They see the love and purity of the bondage."

about Queer fiction and writings in India? How do you think *Travails of Entrapment* is different or similar to them?

Dr. Roy: Queer fiction or writing is a relatively new genre post-independence in this country. The pioneers Hoshang Merchant and R. Raj Rao are those writers whom you can consider bringing the global focus on Indian queer writings, later many writers joined their group. I always have considered it to be marginal writings in Indian Literature in English, same as Dalit writings. How many of them are widely read? We as readers in this country are more fascinated by Hollinghurst or Easherwood than our Rao or Merchant – there is a saying that the white monolith and the West attracts us, and it's even true when Literature is considered. You have to win a global prize to be a good writer, that is why many of us know Vikram Seth's writings so well, in comparison to Rao or Merchant.



They all talk about the reality of life, many new writers do focus on the same thought, and somehow I also follow the same path. But as you said, this is an epic tale, so it stands apart, doesn't it make all the difference?

Hadi: *Don't you feel you will be labeled as a 'gay writer' or a writer writing 'gay literature'? What are your thoughts about it?*

Dr. Roy: What's the harm in being labeled? Don't we tend to label writers as Bengali or Marathi, instead considering them as just writers! Take the example of bestsellers, Grisham or Asimov, are also tagged as writers with particular genre. Genre-based writings are exactly what each writer does, I also followed that. Until and unless we writers take a strong voice and retaliate against everything through our writings, we cannot avoid being categorized into generic groups.

"Most of the novel is the crude reality of being gay in this country"

Hadi: *Do you consider Travails of Entrapment as a real portrayal of Indian society and culture?*

Dr. Roy: Yes, I do consider that it's a portrayal of typical Indian society. Otherwise, why such discriminations— Rohan undergoes sodomy but keeps silent, Vaibhav undergoes expulsion,



still he cannot voice his real feelings. But there are some extreme points where Meena accepts Paras as Rohan's life partner, same with Paras' family. Here I drew such fictional portrayals which might seem as unrealistic, but just think once, aren't the rural or pahadi people (as in the novel) more tolerant when sexuality is considered? They see the love and purity of the bondage. So I think it's portrayal of real India.

Hadi: *What was the most important message you want your readers to come across through Travails of Entrapment?*

Dr. Roy: Two important messages I wanted to give. The first and foremost is no gay person should lose hope in life, because that will ultimately lead you to be liberated. And the second one is respect the purity of relationship whether heterosexual or homosexual. The bondage matters more than anything.

Hadi: *How are you feeling about the response you have received from your readers?*

Dr. Roy: One word- ELATED. I

feel a divine bliss when my readers become so frank in their responses personally sent to me through emails. Recently when I went to the airport to book my ticket, the counter boy, as he filled up my name and email, stared at me, and within few seconds came out and asked for an autograph on my book. Believe me, nothing better can happen than this. I'm not a celebrity writer but such reactions from my readers touch my heart.

Hadi: *Any new writing projects?*

Dr. Roy: (Smiles) I don't think any writer writes just one book and sits idle. Yes, I'm writing my new novel, let's see how it comes out.

The One Year That Was...

Online LGBT Podcast Jub We Talk completed a year. Anuj Arya recounts the journey they have covered till now

As a child I would often see my father help my elder brother create a nest for birds. Soon they shifted from little small and cozy nests to a bit bigger homes. It was heart warming to see various different birds in different colors, shapes and sizes come and be there in homes made for them. We have kept all the "homes" at our terrace and I used to observe those little twittering creatures flutter their wings, play with each other, rest and leave when they felt like. Since then I always wanted to make a HOME, where any and everyone would be welcomed with open arms. Well, I am proud to say that now I helped in building Jub We Talk.

About Jub We Talk

Although it is heartbreaking to still explain about Jub We Talk, even after a year of existence, I would still not fall for the safe assumption that everyone here knows about Jub We Talk. Jub We Talk primarily is an online podcast channel where one can dedicate songs, share opinions, have discussions etc, just like any other radio talk show and well, a lot more. It was infuriating to see straight people having so much fun over the radios whereas the members of the LGBTQ community were refrained from any such pleasure. We thought it was about time we got equal. One thing led to another and hence we came up with a Facebook page as well, which is making steady indoors to the hearts of people all over the world.

Big steps ahead

The next big step for Jub We Talk is going to be its own blog. The blog is in the making and we aim to make it a place that would have kalei-



doscopic view to our lives. I would not divulge details, but all I can safely claim is that, well, it is going to be epic.

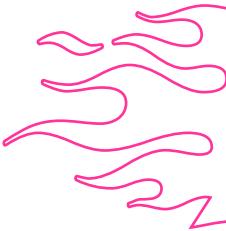
We believe

Jub We Talk has always believed that LGBTQ rights are not any special rights. These are human rights. The main aim of Jub We Talk is to just take it light. We have had enough of drama to last for a lifetime. All we need is love, and friendship, and companionship and fun (which does not necessarily involves and exchange of bodily fluids.)

Come along folks!!

So, if you wish to hop down to a fun place, interact with like minded people, have a little repartee or tete-a-tete with the admins, Jub We Talk is the page where you should be. And to catch all the fun that we have planned for our first year anniversary bash, you should really hop down to our Facebook page. I am all charged up and I am over there, on our Facebook page, waiting for you all. It will nice if you'd drop by.

Gay Twin Flames



You know ever since I was a child, I always knew I had a twin-flame or a soul mate somewhere. My late grandma Lily always told me that your soul mate would be the one who would fill and complement what you lack in your persona. She explained the theory of Yin-Yang to me, where the soul mates form the Yin and the Yang individually, and then become one when destiny makes them meet.

How does it happen?

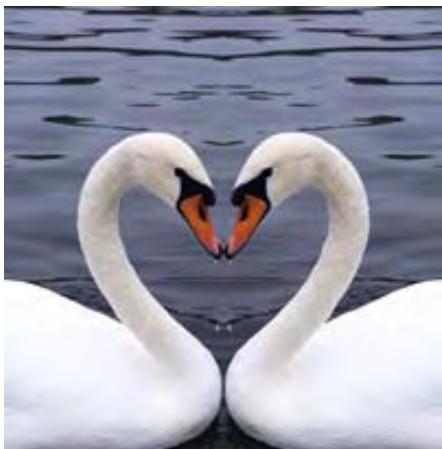
It is believed that twin-souls or soul mates, no matter where they are, would have personal traits which would be the same, experiences and situations or even behaviors and thoughts or actions too would be alike. They both would have faced same experiences in their individual lives, and when you meet him and talk to him for the first time, you would notice more of your own experiences and traits in him. This is how your relationship begins and works. Both the souls would have some variations because of being separated on the physical plane for some time, but when they meet, the two become one. In fact, it is said that the two of them help get each other's "karma



cleared", and in some cases (sadly) the two of them aren't even in sync with one another.

So is it all rosy living with a soul mate or twin-flame?

It is just as any other relationship; damn the media for making things look so nice. You would find faults with each other's personalities and habits. It is actually the bonding that was created in a past life which brings the two of you together this time. There is like an instant connection that happens and you don't have to see the fairies



or hear the bells ring. Compassion for him would be the highest at all times, even when they are down the rut. Viewpoints of the other expand with the help of one in the relationship.

Travelling with them

You would enjoy travelling with your soul mate to various hide-outs and places. One would have the talent to be creative and the other the talent to be innovative. Both of you would have fun, and yes sex while travelling would be awesome. The experiences of life would be fully

rewarding, especially when your soul mate is with you.

Ask yourself these questions?

- Do I have any character flaws?
- Am I too tough to live with?
- Am I willing to share my life completely with my soul mate?
- Am I willing to extend and expand with this soul mate?

Why ask all these questions?

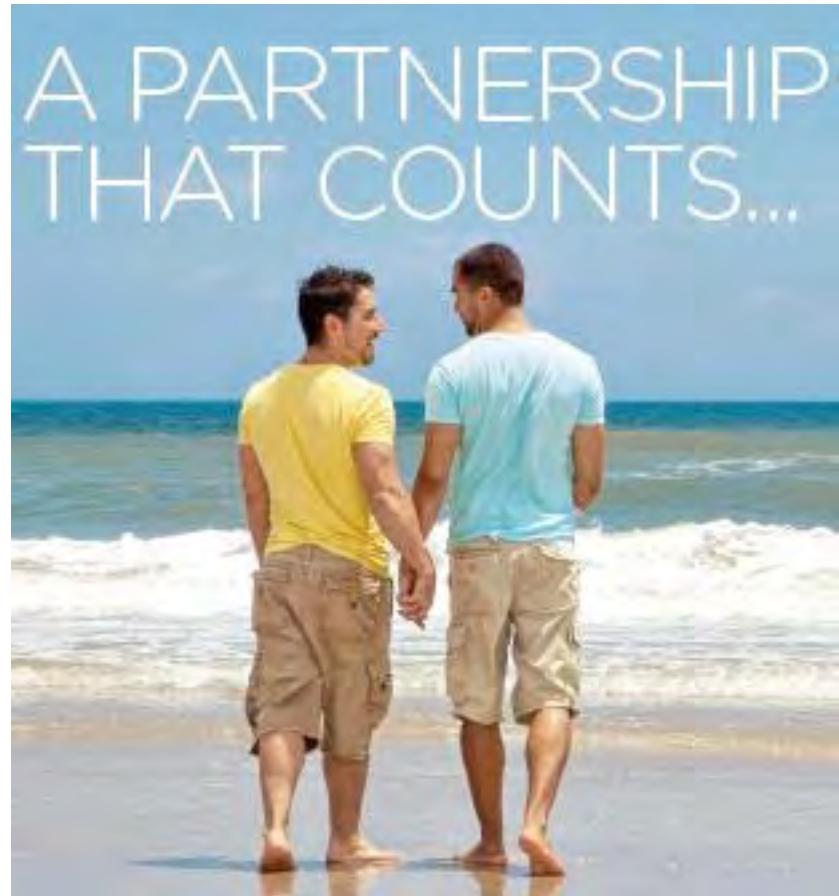
1. Common notion in a relationship for people is that it needs only love and sex. Wrong! You need to have that spark lit even years after being with him. You should be able to say from your soul, "I love him and he is the one I want to be with."

2. The reason why you become a difficult person to live with is because your soul mate would share traits that make you do things that way. And when realization dawns, the two of you would realize the issues all the more. One of you may tend to keep doing things exactly the opposite of what the other wants. But in the end what matters is the result, and this should pertain to what you both want.

In conclusion

Not all soul mates are meant to be lovers; some can be best friends too. So if you have found someone like that, just as I have, lucky us. Have fun with your soul mate and I wish you both love and happiness.

This post was written by Rohan Noronha and first appeared in www.desiboyz.in.



Where Flowers Bloom

Thinking of having your own garden? **Anuj Arya** gives you ideas to design your garden...

There are many ideas for garden design which could inspire you and bring out the creativity in you. What we would like to talk to you about would be landscaping and gardening concepts. Read on well before you start planning the dream garden you always wanted to manifest, and use the ideas and tips we have listed ahead. Once you are done reading this write up, it would be wise to get in touch with an expert and do more research for your gardening plans.

When you have the right accessories for gardening and even the best species of plants, the ideas would set a unique tone, making you content and happy at the end of the day. Actually, let's just say that this would be one adventure which you should embark on, and with the help of a gardening expert or a landscape artist, who knows what hidden talents within you would emerge through plenty more ideas.

Remember, the ideas for garden design should come naturally and not forced, don't adopt an idea to make your neighbors envy you. Think long term and at the moment while you are busy planning the whole garden make-over, let it be an experience full of fun and relaxation. Use cobblestone pathways, green labyrinths around small pools or install a water fountain if you please, with plenty of colorful shrubs and flower bushes around. In short, let your imagination loose and make this garden a haunt for the fairy folks, or maybe a paradise you wake up to every morning.

Patio ideas

A patio is the space outside your home but you own it and need to care for it. Stop! Don't go ahead and pick up any furniture for this space as of now, not even accessories for the garden and not even plants as well. First decide on how you want to use this given space and how do you visualize the end ambience around? What look and feel do you want to incorporate in this outdoor space? Is it a minimal look or a space which helps you relax! We could give you some ideas here to spruce things up. You could use flower trails and small potted plants here. This would allow a cozy warm look to manifest around, and makes the space look big at the same time.

Ideas keeping in touch with modern needs

You could actually get your dilapidated garden transformed into a contemporary and smart outdoor haunt. Trust us when we say your neighbors would be jealous when you use this idea. One tip here which we would like to share with you would be using art which is bright and colorful. You would find plenty of weatherproof art and wall hangings which can be used outside.

Think about the whole layout

Some gardens have spaces that are unusual, and many of us work with budgets that are tight. But yet we want our dreams to be manifested and wouldn't want to cut too many corners to get it done. If you are one of those who loves spending a lot of time in the garden with close ones, the ideas should come easy to you. But remember, think long term and also about the maintenance that is needed. It's best to use paving and decking in lieu of grass, this eliminates the need to bother about weeds. Use as many shrubs of the evergreen species; they need very less maintenance and care.

DOG SEIZURES

Does your dog suffer from seizures? **Rohan Noronha** tells you how you can help your pet in such a situation

Timba has been a happy go lucky indigo pup ever since he came to this planet, but sometimes, we all know all too well, how destiny can change. At times we can keep a curb, whereas, sometimes we cannot. Timba has been suffering from dog seizures for the past few months, it began gradually, with frequencies of once a month, to once a week. Till one day it was too late, since it attacked his central nervous system and his body couldn't take it any longer.

What are dog seizures and what to do when your dog suffers from one? Please read on, and maybe this article would be able to save your baby in time.

It is a stressful time seeing your pet go through such a condition and one needs to understand why dog seizures happen in the first place and what are the best ways to treat such conditions. There are various forms of seizures that could happen to your pet and here we list them for you.

Tonic Clonic Seizure is a mild or severe attack where your pet would lose balance of his body completely and stretch his limbs out. Time frame for such dog seizures would be 30 seconds and once that's done, he would get up and run about contracting his jaws for sometime.

In the case of Petit Mal Seizures, which is rare in occurrence, the eyes rotate upwards and the dog loses his senses for sometime. In Partial Seizures, the dog would have only a specific area affected, with spasms, contraction of the muscles around the face, or even jerking of some muscles. For Complex Partial dog seizures would be the repetition of seizure traits. He would tend to bite his own limbs, run around frantically, smack his own lips or even be aggressive.

When your dog has Status Epilepticus, which is another form of dog seizures, it could be for a longer period sometimes more than three to five minutes per attack and can extend to almost forty minutes in severe cases. No frequency is measured between attacks and it could be fatal for the dog. Finally, we have Cluster Seizures, which would be a single attack episode, where a dog would

have several attacks at one shot.

Here is what you should do when your baby has dog seizures:

 No restraining movements on him while he is under an attack.

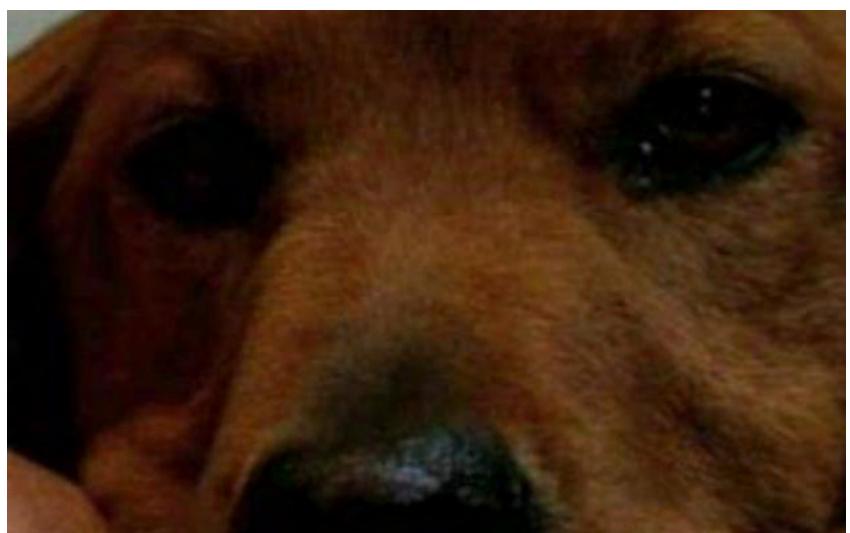
 Clear the area where he is at once, he could injure himself.

 Don't touch his mouth or help him not to swallow his tongue, he wouldn't respond, but would add to more stress.

 Calm down and don't panic, not a good owners sign.

 Keep other pets away from him, they would be hyper and worried.

 Finally make a note of the dog seizures and call the vet.



The Cry of Helplessness



The unfamiliar sight of a Hijra crying evoked a string of emotions within Davneet Narang, and left him wondering when will Hijras gain a respectable position in society

Today I saw a Hijra crying!

I've always seen them strong, bold, I've seen them bargaining like hell. I've seen them at my shop during Diwali, "Diwali ki bakshish" they call it. When they were gone, Dad said, "This one was the son of a small business-man. His name was Kajal. He ran away from home one day and became a hijra." But I could hardly guess what could have been the actual story.

I know how they feel... or perhaps not completely. I once watched a documentary on National Geographic about Indian eunuchs and their festivals and lives and the hierarchy among them. I've seen them celebrating Navratri. They love culture.

They love. Yeah! Once upon a time, it was a tired evening, I was returning from college in a local bus. Two transgenders boarded the bus too, I saw them waving and sending flying kisses out of the window to two young guys (who were waving back). I don't know what relation they had, surely something simple and sweet. Something beyond my understanding, but it made me smile.

I had these kothi friends I visited. We used to chat and argue and laugh - all open heartedly. I objected to his lifestyle and he said- "Teri g***d mein kyu khoon araa?" And I laughed with him. I loved that group and also learned from them. I learned bits and pieces of the secret lingo used by hijras.

And I started respecting transgenders. They've been at the forefront of all queer marches. I saw hijras in the Pune Pride Parade pictures, deter-

mined looks on faces. I always believed them to be open hearted. I assumed them to be happy-go-lucky.

But today I saw a hijra crying. Untidy hair, sparkling black saree, standing in the middle of a chowk, firing bad words at some street vendor. Had the vendor cheated her for money? No. Because she started to talk to herself and then she started crying.

I was managing my shop (Papa had gone to some funeral). Like everybody else, I was just staring at the scene. Watching.

Had someone hurt her physically? Had someone cheated her? I didn't know why she was sitting on the ground between two vehicles on the roadside parking, wailing her lungs out. I could feel the throaty cry wrap me and wanted to do something. I didn't have the guts, or the will.

People on the street looked at her, and went away. A foreign tourist waited beside her for a minute, but lost interest, as she continued to voice her sorrow through a desperate cry. I could feel a pull - a voice inside that said, "She belongs to your community, help her!"

But what if my father returned? I was too chicken. I continued watching.

And she was alone. Alone in the crowd. It didn't seem she had any company around. Generally

they are in groups of their own, aren't they? Why was she alone? Had her group thrown her out of home? Was that her sorrow? Total isolation?

Two ladies in burqa stopped by her side, perhaps asking about what had happened. I couldn't hear anything and they left. What if she was sick? I felt I was being careless about a family member. But I had neither guts nor brains to do anything. What could/should have I done?

Before I could feel any more for her, she was silent

and chewing on her tobacco. If she is sick, whose fault is it? Is it the society's fault again?

When will I see a well employed, happy hijra, respected by society, walking into my shop, not for bakshish, but for some clothing for her actual family members? How long until the utopia??

Again, what am I doing to help achieve it? When she was crying, what could/should have I done? Or am I just *bol-bachan*? Just watching?



Image source OnlineAthens

Straight Talk: The Disease of Homosexuality

Srikanth Ramakrishnan expresses his outrage at the recent guidelines issued by Malaysian Government to spot homosexuality among children

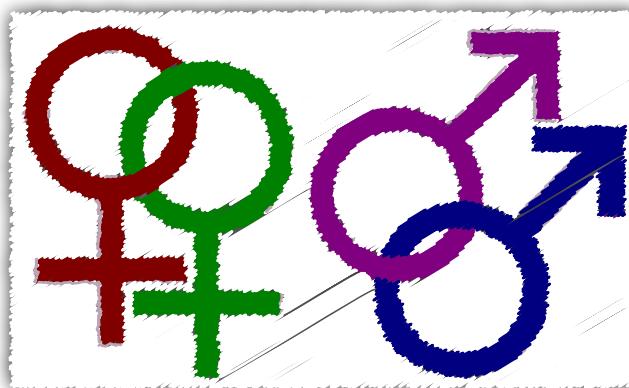
The problem with Society today is that it believes in being elite and if you suffer from any illness of sorts, no matter how small it may be, you become an outcast. Homosexuality too, unfortunately falls under the category of 'illness' as per the decisions of the elite.

Society has a knack of ruining the lives of people, especially if it has been influenced by, for lack of better words, MORONS.

Homosexuality, or as known popularly in our land, 'Gaygiri', is often laughed at, portrayed unrealistically or just looked down upon as a sin.

Films love portraying guys with stereotyped girlish behaviour as 'gay'. I thought this was bad till two years ago, when Baba Ramdev came up with his world-famous attempt to 'cure' homosexuality with yoga. He even announced his decision to 'cure' Manavendra Singh Gohil, the gay prince of the erstwhile state of Rajpipla. This was met with widespread criticism, thankfully, by most of the community.

Last week, I came across something more disastrous. The announcement made about the Teachers Foundation of Malaysia holding seminars to help teachers spot 'gay children'. This is the limit! The Guardian reported that "Light-coloured clothes and large handbags for boys listed as signs, as government forges ahead with anti-gay agenda". An official said, "All religions are against this type of behavior."



I was furious on reading this. Is Religion everything? Seriously? In the 21st Century, a country that claims to be modern and progressive stoops down to such disturbing behaviour and then says religion is against it? Show me where Homosexuality is forbidden in any text.

Just because these texts don't mention it, it doesn't mean that they prohibit it. Absence of anything in the text doesn't count as prohibition. As simple as that!

I'm really worried. Worried about the effect that this is going to have on the mental well being of those poor children

who may show homosexual tendencies, or worse, who these officials think show homosexual tendencies. Then international community hasn't shown much of a reaction and this is not going to end here.

Knowing the twisted logic behind the minds of these so called "teachers", I fear the day when such irrational measure may be implemented in our country too. Under Malaysian civil law, 'offenders', both male and female, can be jailed for up to 20 years, caned or fined. This is again, a gross violation of Human Rights and I worry that it might happen in our India too one day.

I am not a homosexual, but I support the community whole heartedly. If I feel so distressed, you can very well imagine how bad the situation will really be.

SEX: Casual or Meaningful?

When exactly does sex become casual or meaningful, wonders **Rohan Noronha**

Ok, so this Saturday I was out with my gang, girls and boys, and we ended the day with crashing over at my place. Needless to say alcohol flowed (thankfully no one got drunk), and we spoke about, rather had a debate which was intriguing, casual or meaningful sex?

This is what my fag hag June had to say, "I always wanted to grab my mate and do it whenever we could, and we did it. Although we are yet to call each other partners in love, we end up usually having one night stands and yet our friendship is strong, so no harm in it."

Shivam, another friend to answer my fag hag says, "I do it with my boyfriend and before him it wasn't anyone else, not even when I was single. Simply put, I need 'meaning' to whatever I do, sex involved."

So I thought to myself, what is it that makes sex "meaningful" to some and casual to the rest?

Is it caring for someone or relating to someone's sexual needs while intercourse is on which makes it "meaningful", or is it the use of empathy when sex is involved? Meaningful sex I think is when you express your love to the one you are committed to. It is an emotional and to a large extent a very spiritual communication the two of you have, involving the physical zones as well.

For me without what I just mentioned above would be "meaningless", you may beg to differ, but that's what I opine.

My Experience

There was one guy I had sex with and this was before he proposed, and before we hit it as a couple. Sex was meaningful before and after, so it differs from one couple's perspective to



another. This is a very subjective debate that could turn into a war if not treated properly. You have no ways to objectify the whole sense of sexual behavior, and there are certainly no agreements and standards whatsoever.

- ↗ Would you call the losing of your virginity meaningful, if you did it with someone you had no feelings for?
- ↗ If you had sex with someone you were having ONLY a fling with, would that be a monumental sexual experience?
- ↗ Would the long term relationship you are in and the first time you have sex with him, be meaningful?
- ↗ Would having sex over and over again with a F@\$#@\$ buddy be meaningful?
- ↗ Would having sex in a hot tub be meaningful?

In short, if you ask me, I would say when you are doing it for the one you love, truly, madly and deeply, you would be engaging in meaningful sex or else, if it is for your pleasure only, it's meaningless.

The Marriage Folly

Some of your straight friends may want you to get married, but definitely not to a girl from their family; writes Sukhdeep Singh

The one tenet around which Indian society revolves around is probably marriage. Marriage is a concept that is taught to us from early childhood as the ultimate reality of adulthood. For an Indian man, producing an heir is a responsibility his parents prepare him for in many subtle ways, often joking around with him about his marriage at an age when probably he can't even spell marriage correctly. For a girl, a mother starts preparing her for the day she will take over the responsibility of someone else's house. The mother teaches her the household chores, and if the girl is unwilling to learn, she has to listen to her mother's chiding remarks of what her in-laws will think of her. Things don't stop here, even in school, at times when a teacher has to scold a male student (or may be shame him because he doesn't pay attention to his studies and all punishments seem to have failed), the final weapon in the armory of the teacher is again marriage. "If girls don't study well, they will get married and have their husbands fend for them. What will you do? How will you earn for your family?" This is something that wasn't so uncommon to hear from teachers as I grew. And so, the silent message that gets passed (and impressed upon the mind) is that marriage is the ultimate truth of adulthood and giving grandkids to your parents the one responsibility this institution must fulfill (else, you are a failed son). Thus, like religion and God, the concept of marriage is one that gets sown deep in the psyche of Indians from an early period.

So, in the Indian context, even when you come out, the one question whose answer

seems illusive to your friends is, "Does this mean you won't marry? Won't your parents be hurt when they hear this?" So, some (or may be many) of your 'friends' would still like to see you married the traditional way to a girl. One such "well-wishing" friend of mine recently tried convincing me to get married. Rather, he was more concerned about the pain my parents may feel due to my decision (haven't we all heard this priceless line when telling some friend about the decision to come out to parents, 'Why do you want to give so much pain to your parents?') In fact, he told me that he had conveyed to his parents that he doesn't want to get married anytime soon, and this led to a whole lot of emotional blackmail, with his parents crying fearing that he might marry someone against their wishes, to the usual rant of having the joy of seeing their own grand-children. My friend realized (and felt guilty) that he was causing so much pain to his parents (and of course agreed, and may get married this December). That is when the realization dawned on him as to how much pain will I be inflicting upon my parents and thus began his arguments and solutions for me.





His solution was simple, "Get married to a girl, father a child, and after a year or two, get divorced". Yes, this was the win-win solution that he provided. However, it certainly didn't go down too well with me and I wanted to tackle him on his own turf. I told him the complexities of divorce and alimony, and then asked him whether he would let her fiancée and I enter into such an agreement? He squirmed on hearing those words. I tried to calm down his nerves and explained to him how this whole arrangement could actually work, without affecting the life of the girl. I tried convincing him that he could certainly postpone his marriage for two years and with the confidence he has in his solution, he should be able to convince his fiancée too, who will surely be able to see the noble intentions of his. On my part I promised him that I won't be cheating on his fiancée (which I sure won't have a problem keeping). But his unease at the idea (of his fiancée being with someone else) didn't go, and so, I relented and asked him to look for a match among his relatives. By now my friend was irritated to the core. He couldn't understand why of all the girls in the world, I wanted someone from his family! I

tried giving him my reasons, of how he was very close to me (in fact, I was in love with him once upon a time) and so wanted our friendship to be cemented to something deeper (remember those old Bollywood dialogues? I made good use of them) to how I could trust him and his family background. I also asked him, since this was his idea, why was he now opposing it?

My friend didn't have any answer. He wanted me to get married to a girl, but surely not someone that he cared for or was related to him in any way. Since that day he

has never again broached this topic with me. Yes, many of your straight friends might want you to get married, but surely not one of their relatives. May be, the next time someone tries arguing on these lines with you, you could use similar arguments, try to show them what they are doing to others through their ridiculous solutions.



LET THE CARDS SPEAK

- Rohan Noronha

Hello dear fellows and gorgeous people, it is such a pleasure to connect with you once again. I hope you have had a lovely time last month. And I would like to share with you what the "cards" have to tell you ahead. But before that, if you could grab a hold of the "Secret by Rhonda Byrne" and the "Angel Therapy Handbook by Doreen Virtue", trust me your life would change.

So without much ado, let me bring to you what the cards have to say!

Aries Mar 21 - Apr 19



The card here tells me very clearly that all the while you were being taken for a ride. Maybe at work or maybe in your personal life, but the tables have now turned and you would recognise your purpose and those who are real and genuine. Careers could be a little shifty this time, so don't lose your cool if things aren't going your way. Romance will be in the air but don't expect too much and certainly not a fairy tale.

Taurus Apr 20 - May 20



I always stressed upon magic being in you and around you. If you want something with your whole heart and mind, visualize it. For example, if you want to attract money, think about having lots of it, fake it if need be, but let your mind attune itself to it. Don't be fooled by what others have to say, you allowed them to ride your back enough, and don't share all your secrets with your male cousins.

Gemini May 21 - June 20



Respect the womenfolk around and their blessings would do you good. This card asks you to connect to a certain Goddess of your choice, she will show you the way out. If you feel lost and stuck at the crossroads in life, ask the Goddess for a solution and believe that it is coming to you. Your mother would be your best guide as well, trust her gut instincts and intuition.

Cancer June 21 - July 22

A dominating female at work or at home could make life tough for you. The only way out this card says is to abide by what she demands, for the moment. And when you feel the pressure is getting to you, ignore her calls. You should also keep in mind, if the pressure is unbearable, you would want to give up; which means new avenues and new opportunities or learning wouldn't happen for you. The choice is now yours mate.



Leo July 23 - Aug 22

As a leader of many things around, you always would like to dominate. But at times and especially now, it would be that you step back and watch or observe. Stay silent and let your soul guide you to the highest blessings around, trust the card because it says magical times are in store ahead. Don't go overboard with your demands or needs, you may just end up losing it all. And this is especially at the work front.



Virgo Aug 23 - Sept 22

Be wise enough to learn to refuse when you know you cannot handle things. Sometimes you have just got to put your foot down, but do that with love. And if you are trying to explain your point to someone, do it only once. Don't mess with other's emotions while making an explanation, it would lead to misunderstandings, which I am sure you don't want happening.

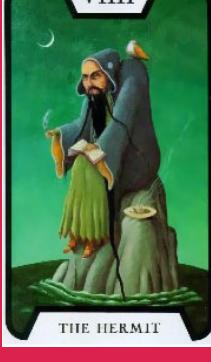


Tip: The seasons are changing and this would affect your energy, please be sure to wear as much white as possible, so that your energy is restored from time to time.

Libra Sept 23 - Oct 22

 Ah! My favourite card, the lovers. Well, I needn't explain much darling Librans, because love and romance is still going strong for you. And if you have had great sex or may be a romantic fling this lovely blue moon on August 31st, expect more of it coming your way. But as they say, too much of anything is poisonous, so take it easy baby boy and spread your charming nature.

Capricorn Dec 22 - Jan 19

 Take a trip out of town, alone or with someone special, but take a trip. If I were you, I would go to the beach and allow the delicious salty air wrap me around and give me new vital energy. It is important to retreat and take your energies back. You have been burned and the energy is low in you as of now, so you need this much coveted trip.

Scorpio Oct 23 - Nov 21

 Sting not anymore, for you shall be stung. If you have been putting people down, intentionally or otherwise, just be a little careful now, because tables are turning. At work you may feel people aren't cooperative, but that's because of the way you have been behaving with them over a couple of weeks. So don't push it too much I say, or else you may lose the ride you expect.

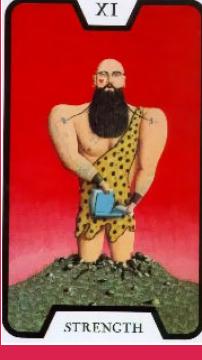
Sagittarius Nov 22 - Dec 21

 The painful thought and memories within are all going away, because justice would be served. Don't give up on your positive affirmations, because you will see the light at the end of the tunnel very soon. Allow fear, ego and hatred to go away, bless the ones who have hurt you, or else you would be dwelling on that. Remember, no pain no gain, and that's what this card is also saying, because if you forgive, justice will come sooner.

Aquarius Jan 20 - Feb 18

 Watch yourself every morning in the mirror and note the first thought that comes to your head. It wouldn't mean much to you then, but it would surely mean something in that same very day. You need to look at what your thoughts and instincts are saying to you, don't ignore the inner voice. Let it flow freely and see how harmonious you get with yourself.

Pisces Feb 19 - March 20

 Don't lose hope over things that aren't working in your favour, maybe there is something better for you to enjoy. See the big picture and make things work for you with the power of thoughts and visuals. Draw a board of everything you want and pray, but be very positive and affirm yourself that it would work as well.

In Vanity is Demise

-Muhammad Moiz

*"He had forgotten truth so long
That they are one
The moon and sun"*

She cursed; her white chiffon dupatta had slipped from her shoulder onto her freshly henna patterned hand. Not only had it rubbed off the dots but also smudged the crown of the peacock. And Surajmukhi was a person with an eye for detail. She prized herself for being a perfectionist. Her henna prints had to be the exact color she wanted, with the same amount of detailing she had envisioned, not more, not less. Her dupattas were almost always chiffon so as to maintain their seductive softness and translucency. Her dresses would be culturally relevant, and simplistic. Too much glitter and embroidery take away the beauty of the fabric, she used to say. "The person should carry the clothes and not otherwise," she often told her apprentices. Makeup, similarly, according to her, was an abuse. If the world can't praise you for who you are in reality, it doesn't deserve to be besotted in any way possible. Beauty lies within the soul; the body is just an image of what lies within.

Mukhia, as her people called her, was a person with a philosophical profundity like none other of her class. She had an aesthetic sensibility that got her many an invitation to art gallery openings and exhibitions. Her musical prowess had her name known to all classical maestros and gurus. Her knowledge of dance sought her many opportunities to teach and instruct, even at reputed foreign

universities. She accepted less, refused more; saying art is to be learnt by toil and not by paying fees.

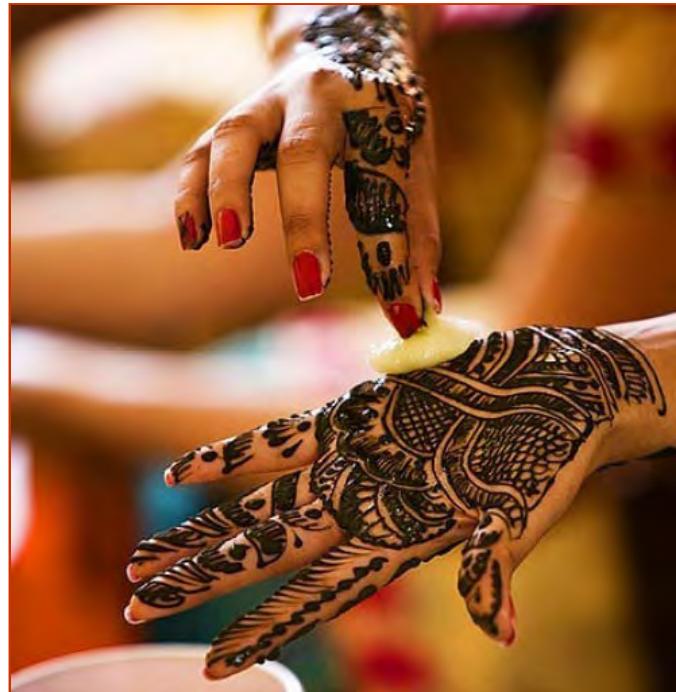
Her past, like all others of her kind, was clandestine and hidden behind many a veil and wall. Almost no one knew what had happened between her becoming one of the most respected people of

the town and her running away from her father's home in the dead of the night 45 years ago. "Love takes us on incredible journeys," she used to tell if ever asked about her past. "It takes us to lush green mountains and it sinks us in the coldest rivers, my journey started with love." "How did it end?" people usually asked. Her intelligent smile used to be enough of an answer to this query.

So as she sat down, to wash the spoilt print on her hand, the beautiful August evening sent a

vagrant tuft of breeze snuggling beneath her open hair and the nape of her neck. This transported her 45 years back to her ancestral village in the remote hills of Abbottabad.

Even as a child, she had a deep admiration towards femininity. Rearing dolls as her own children; protecting herself from the male eyes; adjusting her posture so as not to look too outright "open"; she had all the essentials of a young modest woman. The problem was, she was



only 7. Her antics didn't make her look obsessive, they made her look retarded. So much so she was often slapped for not going out to play, or for acting like "a woman". She took it all but with a price. She was an adamant child and grew up into a rebellious teenager. And she talked of situations deemed inappropriate for her age, which for the backward realms of her village, Labarkot, often became too hard to swallow. She liked keeping to herself at school, or perhaps at some odd moment she might sit down and chat with some sorry school-fellow. Hence she was often punished for behaving rudely or being non-cooperative.

But all hell broke loose at the age of 15; she sat down for dinner one fine night and said to her father in clear words that she was deeply in love with Sajid, her neighbor and "almost" friend. It wasn't wrong for him

being exactly her age. Neither was she very young, infact half the village girls of her age were already married. Nor was Sajid socially disrespected, discredited or below her in any way possible. Many a council was called, she was lashed mercilessly, molvis consulted in secrecy, amulets mixed in her water, sacrifices made. All this labor because she was born to Master Jamil, after 8 daughters, and at the expense of his wife, as a son.

She had never thought of herself as a eunuch. They were fake, dirty and un-woman like according to her. While she was a woman; some reincarnation of a feminine goddess in her fantasy world. So after getting beaten up, locked in her room and made to recite the holy book all week long; she decided to run away from home one cold night, and reached Rawalpindi as it was the nearest of all the cities she knew of.

Life after that if called tough, would be a gross understatement. From getting groped at bus-stands to being harassed at road-side hotels, she

had to face all. Eunuch groups used to convince her at the Pirwadhai stop to join their houses, where her "sahelis" would be there to look after her but her indigenous ego refused to bow down, even after getting raped by the Mashallah Hotel's owner Ghulam Baksh, where she cleaned the tables and served tea.

It was Shabnam who came to the rescue; where other popular eunuchs would see a budding beauty to be ripened in or a fresh body that could earn money for the house, Shabnam saw naivety and potential to score high, traits seldom allowed by the downtrodden hijrah community otherwise.

She sat down at Mashallah Hotel every day for one month, sharp after the afternoon prayers in the sweltering heat of the city and talked heart to heart with Amjad, whom she lovingly

called Soorajmukhi. The bond that fostered between the two was stronger than that of mother-daughter. Mukhia went along with Shabnam. Two days later, in an entirely unrelated case, Ghulam Baksh raped his new 11 year old waiter.

This is all that she ever told. Life from here after is just a haze she said. No matter how much people questioned or desired to know more, she just smiled and said the rest was a happy continuum; sadness is what you seek for it is in grief that we learn the art to live, and the joy to cherish.

What happened to Sajid? She wanted to know herself. What had become of Master Jamil? He would be dead by now ofcourse, Mukhia didn't know for sure. But if life had it, she would one day take a bus to Abbottabad and then to Labarkot, to see if fog still mothered the hills like it did back then. If allowed, she would sit down and pray by the grave of her father, for she knew as per legend, that her prayers had the power to convince the mightiest of gods.

LOOK WHO IS SORRY NOW

-Gaurav Deka

Inside Someplace Else's, insanity raged. By 8pm there was no room to stand. The warm bodies vying not only for attention, but for a square foot of floor space to call their own. The large color screens curled over the corners, flashing jump-out images of perfectly proportioned male flesh. The big neon clock over the entrance swept round and round, reminding all players the need for space.

I grabbed a beer and sat at the corner table near the bar and watched the dancers from the balcony. The bar was conveniently situated on the second floor, offering a safe heaven to nurse your drink and wounds. But it didn't spare me from the harsh music pounding over and over in an angry tidal wave, guaranteed to bring my infrequent but deadly migraines.

Where the hell was John? It was his idea to meet me here. Since last month he is always late for our appointments and blamed it on the grueling modeling sessions. And how can I argue with the shining star of New Delhi ramp shows.

"Rohit?"

"Rohit, is it really you?"

I turned my face to the half familiar voice behind my chair and broke into a lopsided grin.

God it is him. So many years had passed. And, he still looks the same, as the discotheque

winked red and yellow lights at us. He was sitting in the table behind me, in that same stance which I had forgotten. One hand was nursing his drink and the other supporting his chin in the palm of his hand. The famous Neel Khanna look, I used to mock him in the past. I walked up to him with both hands outstretched.

"Neel," I said. "It's been ages since I have seen you man. How have you been?"

He hugged me tight. He smelt of cigarettes and Green Apple shampoo and was reluctant to let go of me.

"I'm good," he said. "I've returned back to Delhi a year ago. I'm in the sales team at Vodafone. Life is going on."

The first illusion was gone. He has grown his hair longer which gives him a slick look-the urban white collar man of the metro and his face had filled up in the years.

I smiled at him. "I'm okay I suppose. You know me, old Rohit-life at a fast lane. I'm still at Wipro, working hard to achieve my targets. And in the weekends, enjoying my hard earned money."

"So how come you are alone? You were always surrounded by good-looking hunks."

He paused to take a drag into his cigarette and touched my shoulders excitedly.

"Hey speaking of hunks-I heard you are going around with a top model now?"



"I'm waiting for him," I said. "He was supposed to be here at seven. It's been more than an hour yaar."

"I knew you would land up with the best as your boyfriend," he said. "Somebody modern and up-to-do date. Must be change from the plain simple Neel." His tone was wistful and there was faraway look in his beautiful chocolate brown eyes. He heard the sounds of his own words and seemed disconcerted with them. "Look at me bubbling away," he said with a forced laugh. "You don't want to remember those times."

His words brought back funny old forgotten memories to me. I played with the tiny stem of my wine glass and turned it round and round with my fingers. I looked at him and softly said, "They weren't all bad memories Neel."

The images of me and Neel vowing to be with each other forever, not to go for arranged marriages our parents had lined up for us, to get the best out of life and to be with each other forever flashed before me. The first time I had asked him out, he refused me as he had a load of washing to do at home. Can you imagine second fiddle to a washing machine? Me, for whom most of the guys in the clubs creamed their jockstraps. I was determined to take him out on a date. It took a month to break him down.

Six months later we moved in together in Defense Colony. The first few months were bliss. We were both busy with our careers. In our early twenties it meant a lot to us.

Still he would find time for his inner self. He was deep into Reiki and had a guru in Malviya Nagar. He dragged me once over there to do a beginners guide to Reiki. It was a one day

workshop complete with a certificate at the end of it. The guru found my inner aura black as the night. I never went back to the guru gain. Neel practiced it regularly and to my irritation, on me to calm my inner self, my anger and to protect me from all evil.

The winters were worse than summers in our Barsati flat. I would slide out of our bed, in the early morning hours in that terraced flat and nudge him awake.

"Neel, get up, it's your turn to make coffee."



"But I made dinner last night," he would grumble and burrow deep inside the blankets.

"Get off me, I'm not getting up."

I would tickle his toes till he collapsed with hysterical laughter and then get up like an obedient child to do the requested chore but

not before the first morning ritual of five minutes of Reiki. It was my turn to grumble.

With a sudden lump in my throat I asked him, "Do you still practice Reiki?"

He put down his beer mug with a load clang on the glass covered Formica table and stared at me.

"You have a good memory," he said. "Yes I'm a grand Master now. As a matter of fact planning to open my own Reiki studio but haven't gathered the energy to do it."

"Why?"

"Nerves I suppose."

"But you will be a good teacher. You are patient with people."

"Let's see Rohit," he said. "One needs a lot of capital. I'm working on it."

At the end of that year, I was suffocated. It was like being dragged down in a swamp, by an ordinary mundane life. I had given up socializing with friends, going out to clubs and sex with other guys. It didn't help my temper and he got the brunt of it. And then gorgeous Nikhil turned up as the only shrub in my barren landscape, I eagerly lapped up; then temptation and fate dangled in front of me.

When I broached up the subject to him, old Neel turned out to be a softie. He patiently refused to let go off me. He suffered nights of me not returning back home and going on with life as before. Till one night, I'm not proud of it; I came back from an orgy and told him explicitly what I did in it-it hit him home. All I remember was the hard slap on my face and the hurt look in his doe eyes. When I woke up from my drunken stupor, he was gone and so were his things.

"Rohit are you ok?" he shook my shoulder. "You have a peculiar look on your face."

To ward him off I asked him with a grin, "Do you remember when I kissed you under the streetlight? And that old Baniya's eyes pooped out of his head? I bet he never pocked his nose out his curtains ever again."

He touched the back of my head swiftly and lightly and took his fingers away.

"Those were the good old days na."

I felt strange, giddy with noise, beer and nostalgia.

Me kissing Neel under every dark alleys and

risking danger for us, watching back to back shows at the nearby Cinemax and tasting different flavors of coffee which the city had to offer. A passion of mine which he too indulged with me.

Where did all those days disappear? I had to ask him. The words were struck in my throat. I had to wrench them out.

"Neel can we have those days back again?"

He didn't hear me. He pushed his chair away and rushed to meet a tall stranger and hugged him tight. The way he used to do million of years ago and dragged him towards me.

"This is Ajay," he said. "He was working in a late shift. We gotta run now. Some friends

are dropping by at the flat."

He came close to me and stretched out his hand. His shake was warm and firm.

"Bye Rohit," he said. "It was nice meeting you. Take care."

I just shook my head at him.

And he was gone, leaving behind a faint trail of green apples, like the way his pillow used to smell as I sniffed it, when he was not in the flat, in those early months when love had a meaning to it. Neel is gone-with his Reiki and his boundless energy for love, warmth and stability in life.

Something I could not achieve in last nine years.

So I sat on my chair once again and waited for John. I doubt whether he would not turn up.



SUPPORT GROUPS FOR LGBT

WEST BENGAL

THE PRATYAY GENDER TRUST

Contact person : Anindya Hajra
Address : 293 Jodhpur Park , Calcutta, Pin 700 068
Phone : 033 2464 1893

E-mail :
pratyaygendertrust@yahoo.co.in

Target populations : Hijras, MSM (particularly kotis)

DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAYA COMMITTEE

Contact person : Mrinal Kanti Dutta
Address : 12/5 Nilmoni Mitra Street, Kolkata West Bengal, India
Phone : 033 2543 7451 / 7560, +91-33 2530 3148
Email: dmsc@durbar.org

Website:
<http://www.durbar.org/>

Target populations : Female, Male and Transgender sex workers

SAATHII CALCUTTA

Contact person : Pawan Dhall, Chief Coordinator
Address : 229 Kalitala Main Road, Purbanchal (N), Kolkata Pin 700 064
Phone : 033 2484-4835
E-mail : saathii@yahoo.com / pawan30@yahoo.com
Website : www.saathii.org
Target populations : MSM in general, male sex workers, transgender people, bisexuals

Sappho

Contact person : Malavika
Address : 11A Jogendra Gardens(South),Ground Floor, Kolkata, Pin 700 078
Phone : 033 2441 9995

Email: malvi99@hotmail.com , sappho1999@rediffmail.com

Website:

<http://sapphokolkata.org/>

Target Population : Lesbians and bisexual women

Prantik Bongaon

Contact person : Niloy Basu
Address : C/o Niloy Basu, Peada Para, P.O. Bongaon, Pin 743 235
Phone : 91 3251 257 029, 9332254855
E-mail : ajnil@rediffmail.com / ajnil123@rediffmail.com

Target populations : Hijras, Kothis, MSM in general

Northern Black Rose

Contact person : Souvik Ghosal
Address : C/o Hori Roy, M. B. Mukherjee Nursing Home, Hill Cart Road, Rajani Bagan, Khudiram Palli, Silliguri 734 401
Phone : 91-9433009116

E-mail:
northenblack_rose@yahoo.co.in

Target populations : Hijras, Meitis, other sexual minorities,

Astitva Dakshin

Contact person : Debasish Mitra
Address : C/o Bablu Bajikar, Baruipur Ukilpara, Kolkata 700144
Phone : 91-9836185589, 9830837440

E-mail :
astitvadakshin@yahoo.co.in

Target populations : Hijras, Kothis

Madhya Banglar Sangram

Contact person : Arunava Nath
Address : Kazi Ali Aftab VIII. Goaljan, P.O. Radharghat, P.S. Berhampore
Phone: 91 9932760967, 9232694700
E-mail:
sangram_06@hotmail.com

SWIKRITI

Contact person : Rajarshi Chakraborty, Secretary

Address : 42/57 DumDum Road, Kolkata 700074

Phone : +91 9831743608, 9433009190

E-mail:
swikriti2003@hotmail.com

Target populations : Bisexual women, lesbians, MSM in general, transgender people

PEOPLE LIKE US (PLUS)

Contact person : Agniva Lahiri
Address : 254, Bonomali Bannerjee Road, Kolkata - 700082, West Bengal, India

Phone : 033 2402 9305
E-mail : pluskolkata@gmail.com

Target populations : Support group for young gender variants

SWAPNIL

Contact person : SUMAN RUDRA

Address : Kotalhat Dist-Burdwan, P.O. Burdwan, Pin 751015, West Bengal

Phone : 09932241372

E-mail :
swapnil_burdwan@yahoo.co.in

Target populations : MSM & TG Groups

MAHARASHTRA

Samapathik Trust, Pune

Contact person : Bindumadhav Khire

Address : Samapathik Trust, 1004 Budhwar Peth, Office No. 9, 3rd Floor, Building Name: Rameshwar Market, Pune

Phone : (020) 6417 9112

E-mail :
samapathik@hotmail.com



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